

A  
A  
0  
0  
1  
4  
2  
4  
5  
9  
2  
2



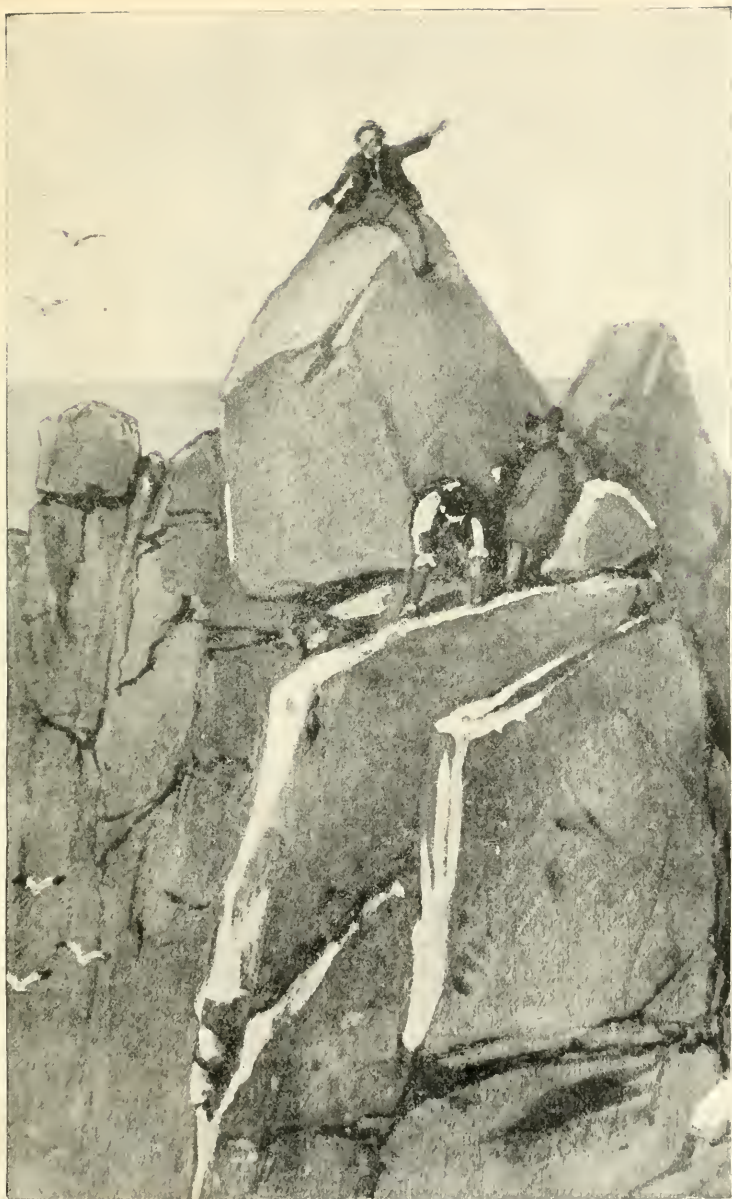
UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY

# JOHN FORSTER

by One of his Friends



THE LATE MR. JOHN FORSTER.



*From a sketch by  
Clarkson Stanfield, R.A.*

**The Logan Stone in Cornwall, with  
John Forster seated on the top.**

From "Charles Dickens and his Friends," by W. Teignmouth Shore. (Cassell.)



My natural ~~size~~

in water about 1/2 inch

JOHN FORSTER

Bunell's mistake

to John Forster and his  
Friend  
by Richard R. R.  
1912



# JOHN FORSTER

BY

ONE OF HIS FRIENDS

*By Percy F. Forster  
and Diablin.*



LONDON  
CHAPMAN & HALL LTD.

1903





PR  
4'105  
F4 Z68

LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
SANTA BARBARA

JOHN FORSTER.

A MAN OF LETTERS OF THE OLD SCHOOL.

ONE of the most robust, striking, and many-sided characters of his time was John Forster, a rough, uncompromising personage, who, from small and obscure beginnings, shouldered his way to the front until he came to be looked on by all as guide, friend and arbiter. From a struggling newspaperman he emerged into handsome chambers in Lincoln's Inn Fields, from thence to a snug house in Montague Square, ending in a handsome stone mansion which he built for himself at Palace Gate, Kensington, with its beautiful library-room at the back, and every luxury of "lettered ease."

If anyone desired to know what Dr. Johnson was like, he could have found him in Forster. There was the same social intolerance; the same "dispersion of humbug"; the same loud voice, attuned to a mellifluous softness on occasion, especially with ladies or persons of rank; the love of "talk" in which he assumed the lead—and kept it too; and the contemptuous scorn of what he did not approve. But then all this was backed by admirable training and full knowledge. He was a deeply read, cultivated

man, a fine critic, and, with all his arrogance, despotism, and rough "ways," a most interesting, original, delightful person—for those he liked that is, and whom he had made his own. His very "build" and appearance was also that of the redoubtable Doctor: so was his loud and hearty laugh. Woe betide the man on whom he chose to "wipe his shoes" (Browning's phrase), for he could wipe them with a will. He would thus roar you down. It was "*intol-er-able*"—everything was "*in-tol-er-able*!"—it is difficult to describe the fashion in which he rolled forth the syllables. Other things were "all Stuff!" "Monstrous!" "Incredible!" "Don't tell me!" Indeed I, with many, could find a parallel in the great old Doctor for almost everything he said. Even when there was a smile at his vehemence, he would unconsciously repeat the Doctor's autocratic methods.

Forster's life was indeed a striking and encouraging one for those who believe in the example of "self-made men." His aim was somewhat different from the worldly types, who set themselves to become wealthy, or to have lands or mansions. Forster's more moderate aspiration was to reach to the foremost rank of the literary world: and he succeeded. He secured for himself an excellent education, never spared himself for study or work, and never rested till he had built himself that noble mansion at Kensington, of which I have spoken, furnished with books, pictures, and rare things. Here he could, Mæcenas-like, entertain his literary friends of all

degrees, with a vast number of other friends and acquaintances, notable in their walks of life. It is astonishing what a circle he had gathered round him, and how intimate he was with all: political men such as Brougham, Guizot, Gladstone, Forster, Cornwall Lewis (Disraeli he abhorred as much as his friend of Chelsea did, who once asked me, "What is there new about *our Jew Premier?*" ): Maclise, Landseer, Frith, and Stanfield, with dozens of other painters: every writer of the day, almost without exception, late or early. With these, such as Anthony Trollope, he was on the friendliest terms, though he did not "grapple them to him with hooks of steel." With the Bar it was the same: he was intimate with the brilliant and agreeable Cockburn; with Lord Coleridge (then plain Mr. Coleridge), who found a knife and a fork laid for him any day that he chose to drop in, which he did pretty often. The truth was that in any company his marked personality, both physical and mental; his magisterial face and loud decided voice, and his reputation of judge and arbiter, at once impressed and commanded attention. People felt that they ought to know this personage at once.

It is extraordinary what perseverance and a certain power of will, and that of not being denied, will do in this way. His broad face and cheeks and burly person were not made for rebuffs. He seized on persons he wished to know and made them his own at once. I always thought it was the most

characteristic thing known of him in this way, his striding past Bunn the manager—then his enemy—in his own theatre, taking no notice of him and passing to Macready's room, to confer with him on measures hostile to the said Bunn. As Johnson was said to toss and gore his company, so Forster trampled on those he condemned. I remember he had a special dislike to one of Boz's useful henchmen. An amusing story was told, that after some meeting to arrange matters with Bradbury and Evans, the printers, Boz, ever charitable, was glad to report to Forster some hearty praise by this person, of the ability with which he (Forster) had arranged the matters, thus amiably wishing to propitiate the autocrat in his friend's interest. But, said the uncompromising Forster, "I am truly sorry, my dear Dickens, that I cannot reciprocate your friend's compliment, for *a d—nder ass I never encountered in the whole course of my life!*" A comparative that is novel and will be admired.

Forster had a determined way with him, of forcing an answer that he wanted ; driving you into a corner as it were. A capital illustration of this power occurred in my case. I had sent to a London "second hand" bookseller to supply me with a copy of the two quarto volumes of Garrick's life, "huge armfuls." It was with some surprise that I noted the late owner's name and book-plate, which was that of "John Forster, Esq., Lincoln's Inn Fields." At the moment he had given me Garrick's original MS. correspondence, of which he had a score of volumes,

and was helping me in many other ways. Now it was a curious coincidence that this one, of all existing copies, should come to me. Next time I saw him I told him of it. He knitted his brows and grew thoughtful. "*My copy!* Ah! I can account for it! It was one of the volumes I lent to that fellow"—mentioning the name of the "fellow"—"he no doubt sold it for drink!" "Oh, so *that* was it," I said rather incautiously. "But *you*," he said sternly, "tell me what did *you* think when you saw my name? Come now! How did it leave my library?" This was awkward to answer. "I suppose you thought I was in the habit of selling my books? Surely not?" Now this was what I *had* thought. "Come! You must have had some view on the matter. Two huge volumes like that are not easily stolen." It was with extraordinary difficulty that I could extricate myself.

It was something to talk to one who had been intimate with Charles Lamb, and of whom he once spoke to me, with tears running down his cheeks, "Ah! poor dear Charles Lamb!" The next day he had summoned his faithful clerk, instructing him to look out among his papers—such was his way—for all the Lamb letters, which were then lent to me. And most interesting they were. In one, Elia calls him "*Fooster*," I fancy taking off Carlyle's pronunciation.

As a writer and critic Forster held a high, unquestioned place, his work being always received with respect as of one of the masters. He had based his style on the admirable, if somewhat old-fashioned

models, had regularly *learned* to write, which few do now, by studying the older writers : Swift, Addison, and, above all, the classics.

He was at first glad to do "job work," and was employed by Dr. Lardner to furnish the "Statesmen of the Commonwealth" to his Encyclopædia. Lardner received from him a conscientious bit of work, but which was rather dry reading, something after the pattern of Dr. Lingard, who was then in fashion. But presently he was writing *con amore*, a book after his own heart, *The Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith*, in which there is a light, gay touch, somewhat peculiar at times, but still very agreeable. It is a charming book, and graced with exquisite sketches by his friend Maclise and other artists. There was a great deal of study and "reading" in it, which engendered an angry controversy with Sir James Prior, a ponderous but pains-taking writer, who had collected every scrap that was connected with Goldy. Forster, charged with helping himself to what another had gathered, sternly replied, as if it could not be disputed, that he had merely gone to the same common sources as Prior, and had found what he had found ! But this was seasoned with extraordinary abuse of poor Prior, who was held up as an impostor for being so industrious. Nothing better illustrated Forster's way : "The fellow was preposterous—intolerable. I had just as good a right to go to the old magazines as he had." It was, indeed, a most amusing and characteristic controversy.

At this time the intimacy between Boz and the young writer—two young men, for they were only thirty-six—was of the closest. Dickens' admiration of his friend's book was unbounded. He read it with delight and expressed his admiration with an affectionate enthusiasm. It was no wonder that in "gentle Goldsmith's life" thus unfolded, he found a replica of his own sore struggles. No one knew better the "fiercer crowded misery in garret toil and London loneliness" than he did.

## TO CHARLES DICKENS.

Genius and its rewards are briefly told :  
 A liberal nature and a niggard doom,  
 A difficult journey to a splendid tomb.  
 New writ, nor lightly weighed, that story old  
 In gentle Goldsmith's life I here unfold ;  
 Thro' other than lone wild or desert gloom,  
 In its mere joy and pain, its blight and bloom,  
 Adventurous. Come with me and behold,  
 O friend with heart as gentle for distress,  
 As resolute with fine wise thoughts to bind  
 The happiest to the unhappiest of our kind,  
 That there is fiercer crowded misery  
 In garret toil and London loneliness  
 Than in cruel islands mid the far off sea.

March, 1848.

JOHN FORSTER.

It will be noted what a warmth of affection is shown in these pleasing lines. Some of the verses linger in his memory : the last three especially. The allusion to Dickens is as truthful as it is charming. The "cruel islands mid the far off sea" was often



quoted, though there were sometimes sarcastic appeals to the author to name his locality.

This *Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith* is a truly charming book : charming in the writing, in its typographic guise, and its forty graceful illustrations by his friends, Maclise, Leech, Browne, etc. It appeared in 1848. A pleasing feature of those times was the close fellowship between the writers and the painters and other artists, as was shown in the devoted affection of Maclise and others to Dickens. There is more of class apart nowadays. Artists and writers are not thus united. The work has gone through many editions ; but, after some years the whim seized him to turn it into an official literary history of the period, and he issued it as a "Life and Times," with an abundance of notes and references. All the pleasant air of story telling, the "Life and Adventures," so suited to poor Goldy's shiftless career, were abolished. It was a sad mistake, much deprecated by his friends, notably by Carlyle. But at the period Forster was in his *Sir Oracle* vein and inclined to lofty periods.

"My dear Forster," wrote Boz to him, "I cannot sufficiently say how proud I am of what you have done, and how sensible I am of being so tenderly connected with it. I desire no better for my fame, when my personal dustiness shall be past the contrast of my love of order, than such a biographer—and such a critic. And again I say most solemnly that literature in England has never had, and probably never will



have, such a champion as you are in right of this book." "As a picture of the time I really think it is impossible to give it too much praise. It seems to me to be the very essence of all about the time that I have ever seen in biography or fiction, presented in most wise and humane lights. I have never liked him so well. And as to Goldsmith himself and *his* life, and the manful and dignified assertion of him, without any sobs, whines, or convulsions of any sort, it is throughout a noble achievement of which, apart from any private and personal affection for you, I think and really believe I should feel proud." What a genuine affectionate ring is here!

Later Forster lost this agreeable touch, and issued a series of ponderous historical treatises, enlargements of his old "Statesmen." These were dreary things, pedantic, solemn and heavy; they might have been by the worthy Rollin himself. Such was the *Life of Sir John Eliot*, the *Arrest of the Five Members*, and others.

No one had been so intimate with Savage Landor as he had, or admired him more. He had known him for years and was chosen as his literary executor. With such materials one might have looked for a lively, vivacious account of this tempestuous personage. But Forster dealt with him in his magisterial way, and furnished a heavy treatise, on critical and historical principles. Everything here is treated according to the strict canons and in judicial fashion. On every poem there was a long and profound criticism of many pages, which I believe

was one of his own old essays used again, fitted into the book. The hero is treated as though he were some important historical personage. Everyone knew Landor's story; his shocking violences and lack of restraint; his malignity where he disliked. His life was full of painful episodes, but Forster, like Podsnap, would see none of these things. He waved them away with his "monstrous!" "intolerable!" and put them out of existence.

According to him, not a word of the scandals was true. Landor was a noble-hearted man; misjudged, and carried away by his feelings. The pity of it was he could have made of it a most lasting, entertaining book had he brought to it the pleasantly light touch he was later to bring to his account of Dickens. But he took it all too solemnly. Landor's life was full of grotesque scenes, and Forster might have alleviated the harsh views taken of his friend by dealing with him as an impetuous, irresponsible being, amusing even in his delinquencies. Boz gave a far juster view of him in *Boythorn*. In almost the year of his death Forster began another tremendous work, *The Life of Swift*, for which he had been preparing and collecting for many years. No one was so fitted by profound knowledge of the period. He had much valuable MS. material, but the first volume, all he lived to finish, was leaden enough. Of course he was writing with disease weighing him down, with nights that were sleepless and spent in general misery. But even with all allowance it was a dull and conventional thing.

It has been often noted how a mere trifle will, in an extraordinary way, determine or change the whole course of a life. I can illustrate this by my own case. I was plodding on contentedly at the Bar without getting "no forrarder," with slender meagre prospects, but with a hankering after "writing," when I came to read this *Life of Goldsmith* that I have just been describing, which filled me with admiration. The author was at the moment gathering materials for his *Life of Swift*, when it occurred to me that I might be useful to him in getting up all the local Swiftian relics, traditions, etc. I set to work, obtained them, made the sketches, and sent them to him in a batch. He was supremely grateful, and never forgot the volunteered trifling service. To it I owe a host of literary friends and acquaintance with the "great guns," Dickens, Carlyle, and the rest; and when I ventured to try my prentice pen, it was Forster who took personal charge of the venture. It was long remembered at the *Household Words* office how he stalked in one morning, stick in hand, and, flinging down the paper, called out, "Now, mind, no nonsense about it, no humbug, no returning it with a polite circular, and all that; see that it is read and duly considered." That was the turning-point. To that blunt declaration I owe some forty years of enjoyment and employment—for there is no enjoyment like that of writing—to say nothing of money in abundance.

He once paid a visit to Dublin, when we had

many an agreeable expedition to Swift's haunts, which, from the incuriousness of the place at the time, were still existing. We went to Hoey's Court in "The Liberties," a squalid alley with a few ruined houses, among which was the one in which Swift was born. Thence to St. Patrick's, to Marsh's Library, not then rebuilt, where he turned over with infinite interest Swift's well-noted folios. Then on to Trinity College, where there was much that was curious; to Swift's Hospital, where, from his office in the Lunacy Commission, he was quite at home. He at once characteristically assumed the air of command, introducing himself with grave dignity to the authorities, by-and-by pointing out matters which might be amended, among others the bareness of the walls, which were without pictures. In the grounds he received all the confidences of the unhappy patients and their complaints (one young fellow bitterly appealing to him on the hardship of not being allowed to smoke, while he had a pipe in his mouth at the time). He would pat others on the back and encourage them in quite a professional manner. Of all these Swift localities I had made little vignette drawings in "wash," which greatly pleased him and were to have been engraved in the book. They are now duly registered and to be seen in the collection at South Kensington. Poor dear Forster! How happy he was on that "shoemaker's holiday" of his, driving on outside cars (with infinite difficulty holding on), walking the streets, seeing old friends,

and delighted with everything. His old friend and class fellow, Whiteside, gave him a dinner to which I attended him, where was the late Dr. Lloyd, the Provost of the College, a learned man, whose works on "Optics" are well known. It was pleasant to note how Forster, like his prototype, the redoubtable Doctor, here "talked for ostentation." "I knew, sir," he might say, "that I was expected to talk, to talk suitably to my position as a distinguished visitor." And so he did. It was an excellent lesson in conversation to note how he took the lead—"laid down the law," while poor Whiteside flourished away in a torrent of words, and the placid Lloyd more adroitly strove occasionally to "get in." But Forster held his way with well-rounded periods, and seemed to enjoy entangling his old friend in the consequences of some exuberant exaggeration. "My dear Whiteside, how *can* you say so? Do you not see that by saying such a thing you give yourself away?" etc.

Forster, however, more than redeemed himself when he issued his well-known *Life of Dickens*, a work that was a perfect delight to the world and to his friends. For here is the proper lightness of touch. The complete familiarity with every detail of the course of the man of whose life his had been a portion, and the quiet air of authority which he could assume in consequence, gave the work an attraction that was beyond dispute. There have been, it is said, some fifteen or sixteen official Lives issued since the writer's death; but all these are written "from out-

side" as it were, and it is extraordinary what a different man each presents. But hardly sufficient credit has been given to him for the finished style which only a true and well trained critic could have brought, the easy touch, the appropriate treatment of trifles, the mere indication as it were, the correct passing by or sliding over of matters that should not be touched. All this imparted a dignity of treatment, and though familiar, the whole was gay and bright. True, occasionally he lapsed into his favourite pomposness and autocracy, but this made the work more characteristic of the man. Nothing could have been in better taste than his treatment of certain passages in the author's life as to which, he showed, the public were not entitled to demand more than the mere historical mention of the facts. When he was writing this *Life* it was amusing to find how sturdily independent he became. The "Blacking episode" could not have been acceptable, but Forster was stern and would not bate a line. So, with much more—he "rubbed it in" without scruple. The true reason, by the way, of the uproar raised against the writer, was that it was too much of a close borough, no one but Boz and his Bear leader being allowed upon the stage. Numbers had their little letters from the great man with many compliments and favours which would look well in print. Many, like Wilkie Collins or Edmund Yates, had a whole collection. I myself had some sixty or seventy. Some of these personages were highly indignant, for

were they not characters in the drama? When the family came to publish the collection of letters, Yates, I believe, declined to allow his to be printed; so did Collins, whose Boz letters were later sold and published in America.

No doubt the subject inspired. The ever gay and lively Boz, always in spirits, called up many a happy scene, and gave the pen a certain airiness and nimbleness. There is little that is official or magisterial about the volumes. Everything is pleasant and interesting, put together—though there is a crowd of details—with extraordinary art and finish. It furnishes a most truthful and accurate picture of the “inimitable,” recognizable in every page. It was only in the third volume, when scared by the persistent clamours of the disappointed and the envious, protesting that there was “too much Forster,” that it was virtually a “Life of John Forster, with some recollections of Charles Dickens,” that he became of a sudden, official and allowed others to come too much on the scene, with much loss of effect. That third volume, which ought to have been most interesting, is the dull one. We have Boz described as he would be in an encyclopædia, instead of through Forster, acting as his interpreter, and much was lost by this treatment. Considering the homeliness and every-day character of the incidents, it is astonishing how Forster contrived to dignify them. He knew from early training what was valuable and significant and what should be rejected.



Granting the objections—and faults—of the book, it may be asked, who else in the 'seventies was, not *so* fitted, but fitted at all to produce a Life of Dickens. Every eye looked, every finger pointed to Forster; worker, patron, and disciple, confidant, adviser, correcter, admirer, the trained man of letters; and in the school in which Boz had been trained, who had known every one of that era. No one else could have been thought of. And as we now read the book, and contrast it with those ordered or commissioned biographies, so common now, and perhaps better wrought, we see at once the difference. The success was extraordinary. Edition after edition was issued, and that so rapidly, that the author had no opportunity of making the necessary corrections, or of adding new information. He contented himself with a leaf or two at the end, in which, in his own imperial style, he simply took note of the information. I believe his profit was about £10,000.

A wonderful feature was the extraordinary amount of Dickens' letters that was worked into it. To save time and trouble, and this I was told by Mrs. Forster, he would cut out the passages he wanted with a pair of scissors and paste them on his MS! As the portion written on the back was thus lost, the rest became valueless. I can fancy the American collector tearing his hair as he reads of this desecration. But it was a rash act and a terrible loss of money. Each letter might have later been worth say from five to ten pounds apiece.



It would be difficult to give an idea of Forster's overflowing kindness on the occasion of the coming of friends to town. Perpetual hospitality was the order of the day, and, like so many older Londoners, he took special delight in hearing accounts of the strange out-of-the-way things a visitor will discover, and with which he will even surprise the resident. He enjoyed what he called "hearing your adventures." I never met anyone with so boisterous and enjoying a laugh. Something would tickle him, and, like Johnson in Fleet Street, he would roar and roar again. Like Diggory, too, at the same story, or rather *scene*; for, like his friend Boz, it was the *picture* of some humorous incident that delighted, and would set him off into convulsions. One narrative of my own, a description of the recitation of Poe's *The Bells* by an actress, in which she simulated the action of pulling the bell for the Fire, or for a Wedding or Funeral bells, used to send him into perfect hysterics. And I must say that I, who have seen and heard all sorts of truly humorous and spuriously humorous stories in which the world abounds at the present moment, have never witnessed anything more diverting. The poor lady thought she was doing the thing realistically, while the audience was shrieking with enjoyment. I do not know how many times I was invited to repeat this narrative, a somewhat awkward situation for me, but I was glad always to do what he wished. I recall Browning coming in, and I was called on to rehearse this story, Forster rolling on the

sofa in agonies of enjoyment. This will seem trivial and personal, but really it was characteristic ; and pleasant it was to find a man of his sort so natural and even boyish.

At the head of his table, with a number of agreeable and clever guests around him, Forster was at his best. He seemed altogether changed. Beaming smiles, a gentle, encouraging voice, and a tenderness verging on gallantry to the ladies, took the place of the old, rough fashions. He talked ostentatiously, he *led* the talk, told most *à propos* anecdotes of the remarkable men he had met, and was fond of fortifying his own views by adding : "As Gladstone, or Guizot, or Palmerston said to me in my room," etc. But you could not but be struck by the finished shapes in which his sentences ran. There was a weight, a power of illustration, and a dramatic colouring that could only have come of long practice. He was gay, sarcastic, humorous, and it was impossible not to recognise that here was a clever man and a man of power.

Forster's ideal of hospitality was not reciprocity, but was bounded by *his* entertaining everybody. Not that he did not enjoy a friendly quiet dinner at your table. Was he on his travels at a strange place ? *You* must dine with him at his hotel. In town you must dine with him. He might dine with you. This dining with you must be according to his programme. When he was in the vein and inclined for a social domestic night he would let himself out.

Maclise's happy power of realising character is shown inimitably in the picture of Forster at the reading of *The Christmas Carol*, seated forward in his chair, with a solemn air of grave judgment. There is an air of distrust, or of being on his guard, as who should say, "It is fine, very fine, but I hold my opinion in suspense till the close. I am not to be caught as you are, by mere flowers." He was in fact distinct from the rest, all under the influence of emotion. Harness is shown weeping, Jerrold softened, etc. These rooms, as is well known, were Mr. Tulkinghorn's in the novel, and over Forster's head, as he wrote, was the floridly-painted ceiling, after the fashion of Verrio, with the Roman pointing. This was effaced many years ago, but I do not know when.

By all his friends Forster was thought of as a sort of permanent bachelor. His configuration and air were entirely suited to life in chambers: he was thoroughly literary; his friends were literary; there he gave his dinners; married life with him was inconceivable. He had lately secured an important official post, that of Secretary to the Lunacy Commissioners, which he gained owing to his useful services when editing the *Examiner*. This necessarily led to the Commissionership, which was worth a good deal more. Nowadays we do not find the editors of the smaller papers securing such prizes. I remember when he was encouraging me to "push my way," he illustrated his advice by his own example: "I never

let old Brougham go. I came back again and again until I wore him out. I forced 'em to give me this." I could quite imagine it. Forster was a troublesome customer, "a harbitrary cove," and not to be put off, except for a time. It was an excellent business appointment, and he was admitted to be an admirable official.

In one of Dickens' letters, published by his children, there is a grotesque outburst at some astounding piece of news: an event impending, which seemed to have taken his breath away. It clearly refers to his friend's marriage. Boz was so tickled at this wonderful news that he wrote: "Tell Catherine that I have the most prodigious, overwhelming, crushing, astounding, blinding, deafening, pulverising, scarifying, secret of which Forster is the hero, imaginable, by the whole efforts of the whole British population. It is a thing of the kind that, after I knew it (from himself) this morning, I lay down flat as if an engine and tender had fallen upon me." This pleasantly boisterous humour is in no wise exaggerated. I fancy it affected all Forster's friends much in the same way, and as an exquisitely funny and expected thing. How many pictures did Boz see before him—Forster proposing to the widow in his sweetest accents, his deportment at the church, &c. There was not much sentiment in the business, though the bride was a sweet, charming woman, as will be seen, too gentle for that tempestuous spirit. She was a widow—"Yes, gentle-

men, the plaintiff is a widow," widow of Colburn, the publisher, a quiet little man, who worshipped her. She was well endowed, inheriting much of his property, even to his papers, etc. She had also a most comfortable house in Montague Square, where, as the saying is, Forster had only to move in and "hang up his hat."

With all his roughness and bluntness, Forster had a very soft heart, and was a great appreciator of the sex. He had some little "affairs of the heart," which, however, led to no result. He was actually engaged to the interesting L. E. L. (Letitia Landon), whom he had no doubt pushed well forward in the *Examiner*; for the fair poetess generally contrived to enlist the affections of her editors, as she did those of Jerdan, director of the once powerful *Literary Gazette*. We can see from his Memoirs how attracted he was by her. The engagement was broken off, it is believed, through the arts of Dr. Maginn, and it is said that Forster behaved exceedingly well in the transaction. Later he became attached to another lady, who had several suitors of distinction, but she was not disposed to entrust herself to him.

No one so heartily relished his Forster, his ways and oddities, as Boz; albeit the sage was his faithful friend, counsellor, and ally. He had an exquisite sense for touches of character, especially for the little weaknesses so often exhibited by sturdy, boisterous natures. We again recall that disposition of Johnson, with his "bow to an Archbishop," listening with

entranced attention to a dull story told by a foreign "diplomatist." "*The ambassador says well,*" would the sage repeat many times, which, as Bozzy tells, became a favourite form in the *côterie* for ironical approbation. There was much of this in our great man, whose voice became of the sweetest and most mellifluous key, as he bent before the peer. "Lord ———," he would add gently, and turning to the company, "has been saying, with much force," etc.

I recall the Guild *fête* down at Knebworth, where Forster was on a visit to its noble owner, Lord Lytton, and was deputed to receive and marshal the guests at the station, an office of dread importance, and large writ over his rather burly person. His face was momentous as he patrolled the platform. I remember coming up to him in the crowd, but he looked over and beyond me, big with unutterable things. Mentioning this later to Boz, he laughed his cheerful laugh, "Exactly," he cried. "Why, I assure you, Forster would not see *me*!" He was busy pointing out the vehicles, the proper persons to sit in them, according to their dignity. All through that delightful day, as I roamed through the fine old halls, I would encounter him passing by, still in his lofty dream, still controlling all, with a weight of delegated authority on his broad shoulders. Only at the very close did he vouchsafe a few dignified, encouraging words, and then passed on. He reminded me much of Elia's description of Bensley's Malvolio.



There was nothing ill-natured in Boz's relish of these things; he heartily loved his friend. It was the pure love of fun. Podsnap has many touches of Forster, but the writer dared not let himself go in that character as he would have longed to do. When Podsnap is referred to for his opinion, he delivers it as follows, much flushed and extremely angry: "Don't ask me. I desire to take no part in the discussion of these people's affairs. I abhor the subject. It is an odious subject, an offensive subject *that makes me sick*, and I"—with his favourite right arm flourish which sweeps away everything and settles it for ever, etc. These very words must Forster have used. It may be thought that Boz would not be so daring as to introduce his friend into his stories, "under his very nose" as it were, submitting the proofs, etc., with the certainty that the portrait would be recognised. But this, as we know, is the last thing that could have occurred, or the last thing that would have occurred to Forster. It was like enough someone else, but not he.

"Mr. Podsnap was well to do, and stood very high in Mr. Podsnap's opinion." "He was quite satisfied. He never could make out why everybody was not quite satisfied, and he felt conscious that he set a brilliant social example in being particularly well satisfied with most things and with himself." "Mr. Podsnap settled that whatever he put behind him he put out of existence." "I don't want to know about it. I don't desire to discover it." "He had, however,

acquired a peculiar flourish of his right arm in the clearing the world of its difficulties." "As so eminently respectable a man, Mr. Podsnap was sensible of its being required of him to take Providence under his protection. Consequently he always knew exactly what Providence intended."

These touches any friend of Forster's would recognise. He could be very engaging, and was at his best when enjoying what he called a shoemaker's holiday—that is, when away from town at some watering-place, with friends. He was then really delightful, because happy, having left all his solemnities and ways in London.

Forster was a man of many gifts, an admirable hard-working official, thoroughly business-like and industrious. I recall him through all the stages of his connection with the Lunacy Department, as Secretary and Commissioner and Retired Commissioner, when he would arrive on "melting days" as it were. But it was as a cultured critic that he was unsurpassed. He was ever "correct," and delivered a judgment that commended itself on the instant ; it was given with such weight and persuasion. This correctness of judgment extended to most things, politics, character, literature, and was pleasant to listen to. He was one of the old well-read school, and was never without his edition of Shakespeare, the Globe one, which he took with him on his journeys. He had a way of lightly emphasising the beauty of a special passage of the Bard's.



Once, travelling round with Boz, on one of his reading tours, we came to Belfast, where the huge Ulster Hall was filled to the door by ardent and enthusiastic Northerners. I recall how we walked round the rather grim town, with its harsh red streets, the honest workers staring at him hard. We put up at an old-fashioned hotel, the best—the Royal it was called, where there was much curiosity on the part of the ladies to get sly peeps at the eminent man. They generally contrived to be on the stairs when he emerged. Boz always appeared, even in the streets, somewhat carefully “made up.” The velvet collar, the blue coat, the heavy gold pin, added to the effect.

It was at this hotel, when the show was over, and our agreeable supper cleared away, that I saw the pleasant Boz lying on the sofa somewhat tired by his exertions, not so much on the boards as in that very room. For he was fond of certain parlour gymnastics, in which he contended with his aide-de-camp Dolby. Well, as I said, he was on his sofa somewhat fatigued with his night's work, in a most placid, enjoying frame of mind, laughing with his twinkling eyes, as he often did, squeezing and puckering them up when our talk fell on Forster, whom he was in the vein for enjoying. It had so fallen out that, only a few weeks before, Trinity College, Dublin, had invited Forster to receive an honorary degree, a compliment that much gratified him. I was living there at the time, and he came and stayed with me in the best of humours, thoroughly

enjoying it all. Boz, learning that I had been with him, insisted on my telling him *everything*, as by instinct he knew that his friend would have been at his best. The scenes we passed through together were indeed of the richest comedy. First I see him in highest spirits trying on a doctor's scarlet robe, to be had on hire. On this day he did everything in state, in his special "high" manner. Thus he addressed the tailor in rolling periods: "Sir, the University has been good enough to confer a degree on me, and I have come over to receive it. My name is John Forster." (I doubt if his name had reached the tailor). "Certainly, sir." And my friend was duly invested with the robe. He walked up and down before a pier glass. "Hey, what now? Do you know, my dear friend, I really think I must *buy* this dress. It would do very well to go to Court in, hey?" He indulged his fancy. "Why I could wear it on many occasions. A most effective dress." But it was time now to wait on "the senior Bursar," or some such functionary. This was one Doctor L——, a rough, even uncouth, old don, who was for the nonce holding a sort of rude class, surrounded by a crowd of "undergrads." Never shall I forget that scene. Forster went forward, with a mixture of gracious dignity and softness, and was beginning, "Doc-tor L——." Here the turbulent boys round him interrupted. "Now see here," said the irate Bursar, "it's no use all of ye's talking together. Sir, I can't attend to you now." Again Forster began with a gracious bow. "Doctor L——, I have come

over at the invitation of the University, who have been good enough to offer me an honorary degree, and —— ”

“Now see here,” said the doctor, “there’s no use talking to me now. I can’t attend to ye. All of ye come back here in an hour and take the oath, all together mind.”

“I merely wished to state, Doctor L——,” began the wondering Forster.

“Sir I tell ye I can’t attend to ye now. You must come again,” and he was gone.

I was at the back of the room, when my friend joined me, very ruminative and serious. “Very odd, all this,” he said, “but I suppose when we *do* come back, it will be all right?”

“Oh yes, he is noted as an odd man,” I said.

“I don’t at all understand him, but I suppose it *is* all right. Well come along, my dear friend.” I then left him for a while. After the hour’s interval I returned. The next thing I saw from the back of the room was my burly friend in the front row of a number of irreverent youngsters of juvenile age, some of whom close by me were saying, “Who’s the stout old bloke; what’s he doing here?”

“Now,” said the Bursar and senior fellow, “take these Testaments on your hands, all o’ ye.” And then I saw my venerable friend, for so he looked in comparison, with three youths sharing his Testament with them. But he was serious. For here was a most solemn duty before him. “Now repeat after me. *Ego*,”

a shout, "*Joannes, Carolus*," as the case might be "*juro solemniter*," &c. Forster might have been in church going through a marriage ceremony, so reverently did he repeat the *formula*. The lads were making a joke of it.

Forster, as I said, was indeed a man of the old fashion of gallantry, making his approaches where he admired *sans cérémonie*, and advancing boldly to capture the fort. I remember a dinner, with a young lady who had a lovely voice, and who sang after the dinner to the general admiration. Forster had never seen her before, but when she was pressed to sing again and again, and refused positively, I was amazed to see Forster triumphantly passing through the crowded room, the fair one on his arm, he patting one of her small hands which he held in his own! She was flattered immensely and unresisting; the gallant Foster had carried all before him. This was his way, never would he be second fiddle anywhere if he could help it. Not a bad principle for any one if they can only manage it.

I remember one night, when he was in his gallant mood laying his commands on a group of ladies, to sing or do something agreeable, he broke out: "You know I am a despot, and must have my way, I'm such a harbitrary cove." The dames stared at this speech, and I fancy took it literally, for they had not heard the story. This I fancy did not quite please, for he had no notion of its being supposed he considered himself arbitrary; so he repeated and en-

forced the words in a loud stern voice. (Boswellians will recall the scene where Johnson said "The woman had a bottom of sense." When the ladies began to titter, he looked round sternly saying "Where's the merriment? I repeat the woman is fundamentally sensible." As who should say "now laugh if you dare!") The story referred to was that of the cabman who summoned Forster for giving him a too strictly measured fare, and when defeated, said "it warn't the fare, but he was determined to bring him there for he were such a harbitrary cove." No story about Forster gave such ~~delight~~ <sup>pleasure</sup> to his friends as this; he himself was half flattered, half annoyed.

Forster liked to be with people of high degree—as, perhaps, most of us do. At one time he was infinitely flattered by the attentions of Count Dorsay, who, no doubt, considered him a personage. <sup>His name was Dorsay.</sup> This odd combination was the cause of great amusement to his friends, who were, of course, on the look out for droll incidents. There was many a story in circulation. One was that Forster, expecting a promised visit from "the Count," received a sudden call from his printers. With all solemnity he impressed the situation on his man. "Now," he said, "you will tell the Count that I have only just gone round to call on Messrs. Spottiswoode, the printers—you will observe, Messrs. Spot-is-wode," added he, articulating the words in his impressive way. The next time Forster met the Count, the former gravely began to explain to him the reason of his absence. "Ah! I

know," said the gay Count, "you had just gone round to *Ze Spotted Dog*—I understand," as though he could make allowance for the ways of literary men. Once Forster had the Count to dinner—a great solemnity. When the fish was "on" the host was troubled to note that the sauce had not yet reached his guest. In an agitated deep *sotto voce*, he said, "Sauce to the Count." The "aside" was unheard. He repeated it in louder, but more agitated tones, "Sauce to the Count." This, too, was unnoticed; when, louder still, the guests heard, "*Sauce for the Flounders of the Count.*" This gave infinite delight to the friends, and the phrase became almost a proverb. Forster learning to dance in secret, in preparation for some festivity, was another enjoyment, and his appearance on the scene, carefully executing the steps, his hands on the shoulders of a little girl, caused much hilarity.

All this is amusing in the same way as it was amusing to Boz, as a capital illustration of character, genuinely exhibited, and yet it is with the greatest sympathy and affection I recall these things: but they were *too* enjoyable. There is nothing depreciating, no more than there was in Bozzy's record, who so amiably puts forward the pleasant weaknesses of his hero. Though twenty years and more have elapsed since he passed from this London of ours, there is nothing I think of with more pleasure and affection than those far-off scenes in which he figured so large and strong, supplying dramatic action, character, and

general enjoyment. The figures of our day seem to me to be small, thin and cardboard-like in comparison.

Boz himself is altogether mixed up with Forster's image, and it is difficult to think of one without recalling the other. In this connection there comes back on me a pleasant comedy scene, in which the former figured, and which, even at this long distance of time, raises a smile. When I had come to town, having taken a house, etc., with a young and pretty wife, Dickens looked on encouragingly ; but at times shaking his head humorously, as the too sanguine plans were broached : " Ah, *the little victims play*," he would quote. Early in the venture he good-naturedly came to dine *en famille* with his amiable and interesting sister-in-law. He was in a delightful mood, and seemed to be applying all the points of his own Dora's attempts at housekeeping, with a pleasant slyness : the more so as the little lady of the house was the very *replica* of that piquant and fascinating heroine. She was destined, alas ! to but a short enjoyment of her little rule, but she gained all hearts and sympathies by her very taking ways. Among others the redoubtable John Forster professed to be completely " captured," and was her most obstreperous slave. He, too, was to have been of the party, but was prevented by one of his troublesome chest attacks. Scarcely had Boz entered when he drew out a letter, I see him now standing at the fire, a twinkle in his brilliant eyes. " What *is* coming over Forster," he said, rumin-



ating, "I cannot make him out. Just as I was leaving the house I received this," and he read aloud, "I can't join you to-day. But mark you this, sir! no tampering, no poaching on *my* grounds; for I won't have it. Recollect *Codlin's the friend not Short!*" With a wondering look Boz kept repeating in a low voice: "'Codlin's the friend not Short.' What *can* he mean? What do you make of it?" I knew perfectly, as did also the little lady who stood there smiling and flattered, but it was awkward to explain. But he played with the thing; and it could only be agreed that Forster at times was perfectly "amazing," or "a little off his head."

And what a dinner it was! What an amusing failure, too, as a first attempt; suddenly, towards the end of the dinner, a loud, strange sound was heard, as of falling or rushing waters; it was truly alarming; I ran out and found a full tide streaming down the stairs. The cook in her engrossment had forgotten to turn a cock. "Ah, the little victims play!" and Boz's eyes twinkled. A loud-voiced cuckoo and quail were sounding their notes, which prompted me to describe a wonderful clock of the kind I had seen, with two trumpeters who issued forth at the hour and gave a prolonged flourish before striking, then retired, their doors closing with a smart clap. This set off Boz in his most humorous vein. He imagined the door sticking fast, or only half-opening, the poor trumpeter behind pushing with his shoulder to get out, then giving a feeble gasping



tootle with much "whirring" and internal agonies; then the rest is silence.

On another occasion came Forster himself and lady, for a little family dinner; the same cook insisted on having in her husband, "a dear broth of a boy," to assist her. Forster arriving before he was expected, he was ever *more* than punctual; the tailor rushed up eagerly to admit him, forgetting, however, to put on his coat! As he threw open the door he must have been astonished at Forster's greeting "No, no, my good friend, I altogether decline. I am *not* your match in age, weight, or size," a touch of his pleasant humour and good spirits.

As of course Forster deeply felt the death of his old friend and comrade, the amiable and constant Dickens, he was the great central figure in all the dismal ceremonial that followed. He arranged everything admirably, he was executor with Miss Hogarth, and I could not but think how exactly he reproduced his great prototype, Johnson, in a similar situation. Bozzy describes the activity and fuss of the sage hurrying about with a pen in his hand and dealing with the effects: "We are not here," he said, "to take account of a number of vats, &c., but of the potentiality of growing rich beyond the dreams of avarice." So was Forster busy, appraising copyrights, and realizing assets, all which work he performed in a most business-like fashion. That bequest in the will of the gold watch, to his "trusty friend, John Forster," I always thought admirably summarized

the relations of the two friends. I myself received under his will one of his ivory paper-knives, and a paper-weight marked C. D. in golden letters, which was made for and presented to him at one of the pottery works.

One of the most delightful little dinners I had was an impromptu one at Forster's house, the party being himself, myself, and Boz. The presence of a third, not a stranger yet not an intimate, prompted both to be more free than had they been *tête-à-tête*. Boz was what might best be called "gay." His fashion of talk was to present things that happened in a pleasantly humorous light. On this occasion he told us a good deal about a strange being, Chauncey Hare Townshend, from whom he may have drawn Twemlow in *Our Mutual Friend*. Every look in that sketch reminds me of him ; he, too, had a shy shrinking manner, a soft voice, but, in his appearance most of all, was Twemlow ; he had a rather over-done worship of Dickens, wishing "not to intrude," etc. ; he was a delicate, unhealthy looking person, rather carefully made up. Boz was specially pleasant this day on an odd bequest of his ; for poor Twemlow had died, and he, Boz, was implored to edit his religious writings : rather a compendium of his religious opinions to be collected from a mass of papers in a trunk. For which service £1,000 was bequeathed. Boz was very humorous on his first despair at being appointed to such an office ; then described his hopeless attempts "to make head or tail" of the papers. "Are they worth any-

thing as religious views?" I asked. "Nothing whatever, I should say," he said, with a humorous twinkle in his eye, "I must only piece them together somehow." And so he did, I forget under what title, I think *Religious Remains of the late C. H. T.* There was probably some joking on this description. It is fair to say that Boz had to put up with a vast deal of this admiring worship, generally from retiring creatures whom his delicate good-nature would not let him offend.

Forster's large sincerity was remarkable, as was his generous style, which often carried him to extraordinary lengths. They were such as one would only find in books. I remember once coming to London without giving him due notice, which he always imperatively required to be done. When I went off to his house at Palace Gate, presenting myself about five o'clock, he was delighted to see me, as he always was, but I saw he was very uncomfortable and distressed. "Why didn't you tell me," he said testily, "a day or two ago would have done. But *now*, my dear fellow, *the table's full*—it's impossible." "What?" I asked, yet not without a suspicion of the truth—for I knew him. "Why, I have a dinner party to-day! De Mussy, the Doctor of the Orleans family, and some others are coming, and here you arrive at this hour! Just look at the clock—I tell you it can't be done." In vain I protested; though I could not say it was "no matter," for it was a serious business. "Come with me into the dining-room and you'll see for yourself." There we

went round the table, and "*The table's full*," he repeated from *Macbeth*. There was something truly original in the implied premise that his friend was *entitled* of right to have a place at his table, and that the sole dispensing cause to be allowed was absence of space or a physical impossibility. It seems to me that this was a very genuine, if rare, shape of hospitality.

Of all Forster's friends at this time, of course, after Dickens, and he had innumerable ones, his fastest seemed Robert Browning. As every Sunday came round it was a rule that the Poet was to dine with him. Many were the engagements his host declined on the score of this standing engagement. "Should be delighted, my dear friend, to go to you, but it is an immemorial custom that every Sunday Robert Browning dines with *me*. Nothing interferes with *that*." Often, indeed, during the week the Poet would drop in for a chat or consultation, often when I was there. He was a most agreeable person, without any affectation; while Forster maintained a sort of patriarchal or paternal manner to him, though there was not much difference in their ages. Indeed, on this point, Forster well illustrated what has been often said of Mr. Pickwick and his time, that age has been much "put back" since that era. Mr. Pickwick, Wardle, Tupman and Co., are all described as old gentlemen, none of the party being over fifty; but they had to dress up to the part of old gentlemen, and with the aid of corpulence, "circular spectacles," &c., conveyed the idea of seventy. Forster in the

same way was then not more than forty-five, but had a full-blown official look, and with his grave, solemn utterances, you would have set him down for sixty. Now-a-days men of that age, if in sound order, feel, behave, and dress as men of forty. Your *real* old man does not begin till he is about seventy-five or so.

Browning having an acquaintance that was both "extensive and peculiar," could retail much gossip and always brought plenty of news with him : to hear which Forster did seriously incline. The Poet, too, had a pleasant flavour of irony or cynicism in his talk, but nothing ill-natured. What a pleasant Sunday that was when Frederick Chapman, the publisher, invited me and Forster, and Browning, with one or two more, whose names I have forgotten, down to Teddington. It was the close of a sultry summer's day, we had a cool and enjoyable repast, with many a joke and retailed story. Thus, "I was stopped to-day," said Browning, "by a strange, dilapidated being. Who do you think it was? After a moment, it took the shape of old Harrison Ainsworth." "A strange, dilapidated being," repeated Forster, musingly, "so the man is alive." Then both fell into reminiscences of grotesque traits, &c. This affectionate intercourse long continued. But alas ! this *compulsory* Sunday dining, as the philosopher knows, became at last a sore strain, and a mistake. It must come to Goldsmith's "travelling over one's mind," with power to travel no farther. Browning, too, had been "found out by Society" ; was the guest at noble houses, and

I suppose became somewhat lofty in his views. No one could scoff so loudly and violently as could Forster, at what is called snobbishness, "toadying the great"; though it was a little weakness of his own, and is indeed of everybody. However, on some recent visit, I learned to my astonishment, that a complete breach had taken place between the attached friends, who were now "at daggers drawn," as it is called. The story went, as told, I think, by Browning, who would begin: "I grew tired of Forster's *always wiping his shoes on me*." He was fond of telling his friend about "dear, sweet, charming Lady——," &c. Forster, following the exact precedent of Mrs. Prig in the quarrel with her friend, would break into a scornful laugh, and, though he did not say "*drat* Lady ——," he insisted she was a foolish, empty-headed creature, and that Browning praised her because she had a title. This was taken seriously, and the Poet requested that no disparaging remarks would be made on one of his best friends. "Pooh," said Forster, contemptuously, "some superannuated creature! I am astonished at you." How it ended I cannot say, but it ended painfully.

Some time elapsed and friends to both sides felt that here was a sort of scandal, and it must be made up. No one was more eager than Forster. Mutual explanations and apologies were given and all was as before. The liberal Forster, always eager to find "an excuse for the glass," announced a grand reconciliation dinner, to which came a rather notable party,

to wit, Thomas Carlyle, Browning and his son, the Rev. Whitwell Elwin, the editor of Pope, and sometime editor of the *Quarterly*, the young Robert Lytton, myself, and some others whom I have forgotten. What an agreeable banquet it was! Elwin was made to retell, to Forster's convulsive enjoyment, though he had heard it before, a humorous incident of a madman's driving about in a gig with a gun and a companion, who up to that moment *thought* he was sane. The Sage of Chelsea had his smoke as usual, a special churchwarden and a more-special "screw" of tobacco having been carefully sent out for and laid before him. There was something very interesting in this ceremonial. We juniors at the end of the table, Robert Lytton and myself, both lit a cigar, which brought forth a characteristic lecture from Forster; "I never allow smoking in this room, save on this privileged occasion when my old friend Carlyle honours me. But I do not extend that to you Robert Lytton, and you (this to me). You have taken the matter into your own hands, without asking leave or license; as that is so, and the thing is done, there is no more to be said." Here of course we understood that he wished to emphasize the compliment to his friend and make the privilege exclusively his. But he would have liked to hear, "May we also smoke?"

Forster's affection for Carlyle and his pride in him was delightful to see. I think he had more reverence for him than for anybody. He really looked on him



as an inspired Sage, and this notion was encouraged by the retired fashion in which he of Chelsea lived, showing himself but rarely. Browning was seated near his host, but I noticed a sort of affected and strained *empressement* on both sides. Later I heard a loud scoffing laugh from Forster, but the other, apparently by a strong effort, repressed himself and made no reply. Alas! as was to be expected, the feud broke out again and was never healed. Though Browning would at times coldly ask me after his old friend.

There was no better dramatic critic than Forster, for he had learned his criticism in the school of Macready and the old comedies. He had a perfect instinct for judging even when not present, and I recollect, when Salvini was being set up against Irving, his saying magisterially: "Though I have not seen either Mr. Salvini or Mr. Irving, I have a perfect conviction that Salvini is an actor and Mr. Irving is not." He had the finest declamation, was admirable in emphasis, and in bringing out the meaning of a passage, with expressive eye and justly-modulated cadences. I never had a greater treat than on one night, after dining with him, he volunteered to read aloud to us the Kitley passages from *Every Man in his Humour*, in which piece at the acted performances he was, I suspect, the noblest Roman of 'em all. It was a truly fine performance; he brought out the jealousy in the most powerful and yet delicately suggestive fashion.

Every emotion, particularly the anticipation of such emotions, was reflected in his mobile features. His voice, deep and sonorous, and at times almost flutey with softness, was under perfect control; he could direct it as he willed. The reading must have called up many pleasant scenes, the excitement, his friends, the artists and writers, who all had taken part in the "splendid strolling" as he called it, and now all gone!

He often, however, mistook inferior birds for swans. He once held out to us, as a great treat, the reading of an unpublished play of his friend Lord Lytton, which was called *Walpole*. All the characters spoke and carried on conversation in hexameters. The effect was ridiculous. A more tedious thing, with its recondite and archaic allusions to Pulteney and other Georgian personages, could not be conceived. The ladies in particular, after a scene or two, soon became weary. He himself lost faith in the business, and saw that it was flat, so he soon stopped, but he was mystified at such non-intelligence. There was quite a store of these posthumous pieces of the late dramatist, some of which I read. But most were bad and dreary.

Forster had no doubt some oracular ways, which, like Mr. Peter Magnus's in *Pickwick*, "amused his friends very much." "Dicky" Doyle used to tell of a picnic excursion when Forster was expatiating roundly on the landscape, particularly demanding admiration for "yonder purple cloud" how dark,

how menacing it was." "Why, my dear Forster," cried Doyle, "it's not a cloud at all, but only a piece of slated roof!" Forster disdained to notice the correction, but some minutes later he called to him loudly before the crowd: "See, Doyle! yonder is *not* a cloud, but a bit of slated roof: there can be no doubt of it." In vain Doyle protested, "Why, Forster, I said that to you!" "My dear Doyle," said Forster, sweetly, "it's no more a cloud than I am. I repeat you are mistaken, *it's a bit of slated roof.*"

To myself, he was ever kind and good-natured, though I could smile sometimes at his hearty and well-meant patronage. Patronage! it was rather wholesale "backing" of his friends. Thus, one morning he addressed me with momentous solemnity, "My dear fellow, I have been thinking about you for a long time, and I have come to this conclusion: you *must write a comedy*. I have settled that you can do it; you have powers of drawing character and of writing dialogue; so I have settled, the best thing you can do is to write a comedy." Thus had he given his permission and orders, and I might fall to work with his fullest approbation. I have no doubt he told others that he had directed that the comedy should be written.

On another day, my dachshund "Toby" was brought to see him. For no one loved or understood the ways of dogs better. He greatly enjoyed "the poor fellow's bent legs," rather a novelty then, and at last with a loud laugh: "He is *Sir* Toby! no

longer Toby. Yes my dear friend he *must* be Sir Toby henceforth." He had knighted him on the spot!

Forster always stands out pre-eminently as "the friend," the general friend, and it is pleasant to be handed down in such an attitude. We find him as the common referee, the sure-headed arbiter, good-naturedly and heartily giving his services to arrange any trouble or business. How invaluable he was to Dickens is shown in the "Life." With him friendship was a high and serious duty, more responsible even than relationship. His warm heart, his time, his exertions, were all given to his friend. No doubt he had some little pleasure in the importance of his office, but he was in truth really indulging his affections, and warm heart.

Among his own dearest friends was one for whom he seemed to have an affection and admiration that might be called tender; his respect, too, for his opinions and attainments were strikingly unusual in one who thought so much of his own powers of judgment. This was the Rev. WHITWELL ELWIN, Rector of Booton, Norwich. He seemed to me a man quite of an unusual type, of much learning and power, and yet of a gentle modesty that was extraordinary. In some things the present Master of the Temple, Canon Ainger, very much suggests him. I see Elwin now, a spare wiry being with glowing pink face and a very white poll. He seemed a muscular person, yet never was there a more retiring,

genial and delicate-minded soul. His sensitiveness was extraordinary, as was shown by his relinquishing his monumental edition of Pope's Works, after it had reached to its eighth volume. The history of this proceeding has never been clearly explained. No doubt he felt, as he pursued his labours, that his sense of dislike to Pope and contempt for his conduct was increasing, that he could not excuse or defend him. Elwin was in truth the "complement" of Forster's life and character. It was difficult to understand the one without seeing him in the company of the other. It was astonishing how softened and amiable, and even schoolboy-like, the tumultuous John became when he spoke of or was in company with his old friend; he really delighted in him. Forster's liking was based on respect for those gifts of culture, pains-taking and critical instinct, which he knew his friend possessed, and which I have often heard him praise in the warmest and sincerest fashion. "In El-win"—he seemed to delight in rolling out the syllables in this divided tone—"in El-ween you will find style and finish. If there is anyone who knows the topic it is El-win. He is your man."

I was bringing out a *magnum opus*, dedicated to Carlyle, Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, entailing a vast deal of trouble and research. The amiable Elwin, whom I consulted, entered into the project with a host of enthusiasm. He took the trouble of rummaging his note books, and continued to send me week by week many a useful communication, clearing up

doubtful passages. But what was this to his service when I was writing a *Life of Sterne*,\* and the friendly Forster, interesting himself in the most good-natured way, determined that it should succeed, and put me in communication with Elwin. No doubt he was interested in his *protégé*, and Elwin, always willing to please, as it were, received his instructions. Presently, to my wonder and gratification, arrived an extraordinary letter, if one might so call it, which filled over a dozen closely written pages (for he compressed a marvellous quantity into a sheet of paper), all literally overflowing with information. It was an account of recondite and most unlikely works in which allusions to Sterne and many curious bits of information were stowed away; chapter and page and edition were given for every quotation; it must have taken him many hours and much trouble to write. And what an incident it was, the two well-skilled and accomplished literary critics exerting themselves, the one to secure the best aid of his friend, the other eager to assist, because his friend wished it.

---

\* I recall a meeting by special appointment with Elwin, who came to lunch to debate it. He had already my letter, turned it over and over again, but without result. The point was what edition should be used—the first or the last; this latter having, of course, the advantage of the author's latest revision. On the great question of "Johnson's stay at Oxford," which has exercised all the scholars, and is still in a more or less unsatisfactory way, he agreed with me.

In the course of these Shandian enquiries, the passage in Thackeray's lecture occurred to me where he mentions having been shown Eliza's Diary by a "Gentleman of Bath." I wished to find out who this was, when my faithful friend wrote to the novelist and sent me his reply, which began, "My dear Primrose"—his charmingly appropriate nick or pet name for Elwin, who was the very picture of the amiable vicar. It resulted in the gentleman allowing *me* to look at his journal.

Letter from Elwin on the "unfortunate Dr. Dodd":—

Booton Rectory, Norwich,

Oct. 31st, 1864.

My dear Mr. —.—I have been ill for some weeks past, which has prevented my writing to you. It is of the less importance that I can add nothing to your ample list of authorities, except to mention, if you are not already aware of it, that there is a good deal about Dr. Dodd and his doings, in "Chrysal, or the Adventures of a Guinea." The contemporary characters which figure in the work are described partly by real, and partly by invented circumstances. But you at least get the view which the author entertained of the persons he introduces on the scene. I missed the first part of your Memoir of Dodd, in the *Dublin Magazine*. The second I saw, and thought it extremely interesting, and very happily written. I was surprised at the quantity of information you had got together. I cannot help you to any detailed account of the Maccaroni preachers. They are glanced at in the second book of Cowper's Task. They have existed, and will exist in every generation, but it is seldom that any record is preserved of them. They are the butterflies of the hour. There are no means by which you can keep worthless men from making a



trade of religion, and as long as there are people simple enough to be dupes, so long there will be impostors. It is strange to see what transparent acting will impose upon women. To be popular, to draw large audiences, is the avowed object of many of these preachers. The late R. Montgomery once introduced himself to an acquaintance of mine on the platform at some religious meeting. Montgomery commenced the conversation by the remark, "You have a chapel in the West End." "Yes," said my friend. "And I hope to have one soon," replied M., "for I am satisfied that I have the faculty for *adapting* the Gospel to the *West End*." You may tell the story if you give no names.

You have anticipated my Sterne anecdotes. I will just mention one circumstance. In the advertisement to the edition of Sterne's Works, in 10 vols. (1798), it is stated (Vol. I, p. iv.) "that the letters numbered 129, 130 and 131, have not those proofs of authenticity which the others possess." Now, letter 131 is very important, for it is that in which Sterne replies to the remonstrances against the freedoms in *Tristram Shandy*. It may be satisfactory to you to know that some years after the edition of Sterne's Works the letter was published by Richard Warner (apparently from the original) in the Appendix to his *Literary Recollections*. He was not, I suppose, aware that it had been printed before. Warner was ordained in the North, and his work will throw some light upon the state of things in those regions at a period close upon Sterne's time. You will find it worth while to glance over it. If I can be of any help to you I shall only be too happy.

Believe me ever, most sincerely yours,

W. ELWIN.

There is something touching in this deep affection, exhibited by so rough and sturdy a nature and maintained without flagging for so many years. With him it was "the noble Elwin," "the good Elwin," "as

ever, most delightful," "kinder and more considerate than ever." "Never were letters so pleasant to me as yours," he wrote in 1865, "and it is sad to think that from months we are now getting on to years with barely a single letter." "My dear fellow," he wrote again, "with the ranks so thinning around us, should we not close up, come nearer to each other? None are so dear to us at home as Mrs. Elwin and yourself and all of you." One of the last entries in his diary was, "Precious letter from dearest Elwin. December 10th, 1875."

Elwin had, perhaps, a colder temperament, or did not express his devotion. But his regard would seem to have been as deep-seated; as indeed was shown in the finely drawn tribute he paid him after his death, and which is indeed the work of an accomplished writer and master of expression. "He was two distinct men," wrote Elwin to John Murray the elder, in 1876, "and the one man quite dissimilar from the other. To see him in company I should not have recognised him for the friend with whom I was intimate in private. Then he was quiet, natural, unpretending, and most agreeable, and in the warmth and generosity of his friendship he had no superior. Sensitive as he was in some ways, there was no man to whom it was easier so speak with perfect frankness. He always bore it with gentle good nature." \*

---

\* To Elwin Forster left £2,000 and his gold watch, no doubt the one bequeathed by Dickens. Forster appointed him, without consulting him, one of his executors, but knowing

At another time he wrote with warmth, "Most welcome was your letter this morning, as your letters always are to me. They come fraught with some new proof of the true, warm-hearted, generous friend who has made life worth something more to me than it was a year ago," 1857.\*

When Forster married, in 1856, he was eager that Elwin should officiate, and proposed going down to Norfolk. But legal formalities were in the way, and Elwin came to London instead. "He never," says Warwick Elwin, "wavered in his attachment to him. Sometimes he would be momentarily vexed at some fancied neglect, but the instant they met again it was all forgotten." Elwin was, in fact, subject to moods and "nerves," and there were times when he shrank sensitively from the world and its associations—he would answer no letters, particularly after the period of his many sore trials. The last time I saw him was at that great *fiasco*, the production of the first

---

well that he could rely on his good will, and the legacy no doubt was intended as a solatium for the labour thus enforced. Lord Lytton and Justice Chitty were the other executors. As Lord Lytton was in India the whole burden fell on the other two, and mostly on Elwin. As his son tells, the literary part of the business was most considerable; there was an edition of Landor to be "seen through" the press; there was a vast number of papers and letters to be examined, preserved or destroyed. "His own inclination and Forster's instructions were in the direction of destroying all personal letters, however eminent the writer might be."

\* Memoirs by Warwick Elwin.

Lord Lytton's posthumous play on the subject of Brutus, produced by Wilson Barrett, with extraordinary richness and pomp: a failure that led to an unpleasant dispute between Lytton's son and the lessee.

When the *Life of Dickens* appeared, Elwin, as in duty bound, proceeded to review it in the *Quarterly*. I confess that on reading over this article there seems to be a curious reserve and rather measured stint of praise. One would have expected from the generous Elwin one enthusiastic and sustained burst of praise of his friend's great work. But it seems as though he felt so trifling a matter was scarcely worthy of solemn treatment. The paper is only twenty pages long, and, after a few lines of praise at the beginning and a line or two at the end, proceeds to give a summary of the facts. The truth was Elwin was too scrupulously conscientious a critic to stretch a point in such a matter. I could fancy that for one of his nice feeling it became an almost disagreeable duty. Were he tempted to expand in praises, it would be set down to partiality, while he was hardly free to censure. No wonder he wrote of his performance: "Forster will think it too lukewarm; others the reverse." As it happened, the amiable Forster was enchanted.

"For upwards of three-and-thirty years," says Mr. Elwin in this review (*Q. R.*, vol. 132, p. 125), "Mr. Forster was the incessant companion and confidential adviser of Dickens; the friend to whom he had recourse in every difficulty, personal and literary; and

before whom he spread, without reserve, every fold of his mind. *No man's life has ever been better known to a biographer.* . . . To us it appears that a more faithful biography could not be written. Dickens is seen in his pages precisely as he is showed in his ordinary intercourse."

Both Elwin and his friend had that inflexibility of principle in criticism and literary utterance which they adhered to as though it were a matter of high morals. This feeling contrasts with the easy adaptability of our day, when the critic so often has to shape his views according to interested aims. He indeed will hold in his views, but may not deem it necessary to produce them. I could recall instances in both men of this sternness of opinion. Forster knew no compromise in such matters; though I fancy in the case of people of title, for whom, as already mentioned, he had a weakness, or of pretty women, he may have occasionally given way. I remember when Elwin was writing his fine estimate of his deceased friend, Mrs. Forster in deep distress came to tell me that he insisted on describing her husband as "the son of a butcher." In vain had she entreated him to leave this matter aside. Even granting its correctness, what need or compulsion to mention it? It was infinitely painful to her. But it was not true: Forster's father was a large "grazier" or dealer in cattle. Elwin, however, was inflexible: some Newcastle alderman had hunted up entries in old books, and he thought the evidence convincing.

Another incident connected with the memory of her much-loved husband, that gave this amiable woman much poignant distress, was a statement made by Mr. Furnival, the Shakesperian, that Browning had been employed by Forster to write the account of Strafford, in the collection of Lives. He had been told this by Browning himself. Nevertheless, she set all her friends to work; had papers, letters, etc., ransacked for evidence, but with poor result. The probability was that Forster would have disdained such aid; on the other hand, the Poet had written a tragedy on the subject, and was, therefore, capable of dealing with it. Letters of vindication were sent to the papers, but no one was much interested in the point one way or the other; save, of course, the good Mrs. Forster, to whom it was vital. I am afraid, however, there was truth in the statement; for it is completely supported by a stray passage in one of the Poet's letters to his future wife, recently published.

Forster, I fancy, must have often looked wistfully back to the old Lincoln's Inn days, when he sat in his large Tulkinghorn room, with the Roman's finger pointing down to his head. I often grieve that I did not see this Roman, as I might have done, before he was erased; for Forster was living there when I first knew him. On his marriage he moved to that snug house in Montague Square, where we had often cosy dinners. He was driven from it, he used to say, by the piano-practising on each side of him, which be-

came "in-tol-erable"; but I fancy the modest house was scarcely commensurate with his ambitions. It was somewhat old-fashioned too. And yet in his grand palatial mansion at Kensington I doubt if he was as jocund or as irrepressible as then. I am certain the burden of an ambitious life told upon his health and spirits.

I often turn back to the day when I first called on him, at the now destroyed offices at Whitehall, when he emerged from an inner room in a press of business. I see him now, a truly brisk man, full of life and energy, and using even then his old favourite hospitable formula, "My dear sir, I am *very* busy—very busy; I have just escaped from the commissioners. But you must dine with me to-morrow and we will talk of these things." Thus he did not ask you, but he "commanded you," even as a king would.

One of the most interesting things about Forster was his "receptivity." Stern and inflexible as he was in the case of old canons, he was always ready to welcome anything new or striking, provided it had merit and was not some imposture. I never met a better appreciator of genuine humour. He had been trained, or had trained himself; whatever shape it had, only let it have *merit*. He thoroughly *enjoyed* a jest, and furnished his own obstreperous laugh by way of applause. As I have said, there was something truly *Johnsonian* about him; everything he said or decided you knew well was founded on a



principle of some kind; he was a solid judicial man, and even his hearty laugh of enjoyment was always based on a rational motive. This sort of solid well-trained men are rather scarce nowadays.

Forster was also a type of the old Cromwellian or Independent with reference to religious liberty. He could not endure, therefore, "Romish tyranny," as he called it, which stifled thought. Many of his friends were Roman Catholics. There were "touches" in Forster as good as anything in the old comedies.

His handsome and spacious library, with its gallery running round, was well known to all his friends. Richly stored was it with book treasures, manuscripts, rare first editions, autographs, in short all those things which may now be seen at South Kensington. He had a store of other fine things somewhere else, and kept a secretary or librarian, to whom he issued his instructions. For he himself did not profess to know the *locale* of the books and papers, and I have often heard him in his lofty way direct that instructions should be sent to Mr. — to search out such and such documents. He had grand ideas about his books, and spared no cost either in his purchases or bindings. I have seen one of his quarto MS. thus dressed by Rivière in plain decoration, but which he told me had cost £30.

Once for some modest private theatricals I had written a couple of little pieces to be acted by ourselves and our friends. One was called *Blotting Paper*, the other *The William Simpson*. A gay

company was invited, and I recall how the performers were pleased and encouraged when the face of the brilliant author of a *Lady of Lyons* was seen in the front row. Forster took the whole under his protection, and was looking forward to attending, but his invariable terrible cough seized on him. Mrs. Forster was sent with strict instructions to observe and report everything that did or could occur on this interesting occasion. I see her soft amiable face smiling encouragement from the stalls. I rose greatly in my friend's estimation from this attendance of the author of *Pelham*. "How did you manage it?" "He goes nowhere or to few places. It was a great compliment."

This little performance is associated in a melancholy way with the closing days of Dickens' career. I was naturally eager to secure his presence, and went to see him at "his office" to try and persuade him to attend; he pleaded, however, his overwhelming engagements. I find in an old diary some notes of our talk. "Theatricals led to Regnier, whom I think he had been to see in *Les Vieux Garçons*. He said he found him very old. "Alas! He is *Vieux Garçon* himself." I think of our few little dinners in my house; would we had had more! Somehow since I have been living here the image of him has been more and more stamped on me; I see and like him more. The poor, toiling, loveable fellow, to think that all is over with him now!"

[At the risk of smiles, and perhaps some suspicion of vanity, I go on to copy what follows.] "When I saw Mrs. Forster during those dismal days, she was good enough to relate to me much about his personal liking for me. He would tell them how I could do anything if I only gave myself fair play. He said he was going to write to give me a sound blowing up. "And yet," he added, "I doubt if he would take it from anybody else but me. He is a good fellow." [I still doubt whether I should add what follows, but I am not inclined to sacrifice such a tribute from such a man; told me, too, only a few days after his death.] He praised a novel of mine, *No. 75, Brooke St.*, and here are his words: "The last scene and winding up is one of the most powerful things I have met."

Forster, devoted to the school of Macready, and all but trained by that actor, whose bust was placed in his hall, thought but poorly of the performances of our time. He pooh-poohed them all, including even the great and more brilliant successes. Once a clever American company came over, a phenomenal thing at that time, and appeared at the St. James's Theatre. They played *She Stoops to Conquer*, with two excellent performers as Old Hardcastle and Marlow; Brough was the Tony. I induced Forster to come and see them, and we made up a party. He listened with an amusing air of patronage, which was habitual with him—meant to encourage—and said often that "it was very good, very fair indeed." Brough he

admitted was perhaps the nearest to the fitting tone and spirit of the piece. The two American actors, as it seemed to me, were excellent comedians.

I once saw him at St. James's Hall, drawn to hear one of his friend's last readings. I saw his entrance. He came piloted by the faithful Charles Kent, who led, or rather *cleared* the way, Forster following with a smiling modesty, as if he sought to avoid too much notice. His rotund figure was swathed in a tight fitting paletôt, while a sort of nautical wrapper was round his throat. He fancied no doubt that many an eye was following him ; that there was many a whisper, "That is the great John Forster." He passed on solemnly through the hall and out at the door leading to the artistes' rooms. Alas ! no one was thinking of him ; he had been too long absent from the stage. It is indeed extremely strange, and I often wonder at it, how little mark he made. The present and coming generations know nothing about him. I may add here that, at Dickens' *very* last Reading at this place, I and Charles Kent were the two—the only two—favoured with a place on the platform, behind the screens. From that coign, I heard him say his last farewell words : "Vanish from these garish lights for evermore !"

One summer Forster and his wife came down to Bangor, I believe from a genial good-natured wish to be there with his friends—a family who were often found there. He put up at the "George," then a house of lofty pretensions, though now it would seem

but a modest affair enough. What a holiday it was ! The great John unbent to an inconceivable degree ; he was soft, engaging even, and in a bright and constant good humour. The family consisted of the mother, two daughters, and the son, *moi qui vous parle*—all of whom looked to him with a sort of awe and reverence, which was not displeasing to him. The two girls he professed to admire and love ; the mother, a woman of the world, had won him by her speech at his dinner party, during which a loud crash came from the hall ; he said nothing, but she saw the temper working within, and quoted happily from Pope,

“ And e'en unmoved hears China fall.”

Immensely gratified at the implied compliment for his restraint, his angry brow was smoothed. To imagine a dame of our time quoting Pope at a dinner ! at most she would have heard of him.

What walks and expeditions in that delightful Welsh district ! and what unbounded hospitality ! He would insist on his favourites coming to dinner every few days or so. It was impossible to refuse ; equally impossible to make any excuse ; he was so overpowering. Everything was swept away. At the time the dull pastime of acrostic-writing was in high vogue, and some ladies of the party thought to compliment him by fashioning one upon his name. He accepted the compliment with much complacent gratification ; and, when the result was read aloud, it was found that the only epithet that would fit his

name, having the proper number of letters, was "learned." His brow clouded. It was not what he expected. He was good-humouredly scornful. "Well, I declare, I did not expect this. I should have thought something like 'gallant,' or 'pleasant,' or 'agreeable'—but '*learned!*' as though I were some old pundit. Thank you, ladies."

No one knew so much as Forster of the literary history of the days when Dickens first "rose"; and when such men as Lamb, Campbell, Talfourd, Theodore Hook, Hazlitt, Leigh Hunt, and many more of that school were flourishing.

I see him now seated in the stern manipulating the ropes of the rudder, with all the air of perfect knowledge; diverting the boatmen, putting questions to them, and adroitly turning their answers into pieces of original information; lecturing on the various objects of interest we passed; yet all the time interesting, and excellent company. At times he began to talk of poetry, and would pour forth the stores of his wonderful memory, reciting passages with excellent elocution, and delighting his hearers. I recall the fine style in which he rolled forth "Hohenlinden," and "The Royal George," and the "Battle of the Baltic." At the close he would sink his voice to a low muttering, just murmuring impressively, "be-neath the wave!" Then would pause, and say, as if overcome—"Fine, very, very fine!" These exercises gave his audience genuine pleasure. On shore, visiting the various show things, he grew

frolicsome, and insisted on the visitors as "Mr. and Mrs. ——," the names of characters in some novel I had written.

It would be an interesting question to consider how far Forster's influence improved or injured Dickens' work; for he tells us everything written by the latter was submitted to him, and corrections and alterations offered. I am inclined to confess that, when in his official mood, Forster's notions of humour were somewhat forced. It is thus almost startling to read his extravagant praise of a passage about Sapsea which the author discarded in *Edwin Drood*. Nothing better showed Boz's discretion. The well-known passage in *The Old Curiosity Shop* about the little marchioness and her make-believe of orange peel and water, and which Dickens allowed him to mend in his own way, was certainly altered for the worse.

I had the sad satisfaction, such as it was, of attending Forster's funeral, as well as that of his amiable wife. I had a seat in one of the mourning coaches, with that interesting man, James Anthony Froude. Not many were bidden to the ceremonial.

Mrs. Forster's life, like that of her husband, closed in much suffering. I believe she might have enjoyed a fair amount of health had she not clung with a sort of devotion, not unconnected with the memory of her husband, to the house which he had built. Nothing could induce her to go away. She was, moreover, offered a sum of over £20,000 for it shortly after his death, but declined; it was later sold for little



over a third of the amount. He had bequeathed all his treasures to the nation, allowing her the life use, but with much generosity she at once handed over the books, pictures, prints, sketches, and other things. She bore her sufferings with wonderful patience and sweetness, and I remember the clergyman who attended her, and who was at the grave, being much affected.

Mrs. Forster was a woman of more sagacity and shrewdness of observation than she obtained credit for. She had seen and noted many curious things in her course. Often of a Sunday afternoon, when I used to pay her a visit, she would open herself very freely, and reveal to me many curious bits of secret history relating to her husband's literary friends. She was very amusing on the Sage of Chelsea. I recollect she treated Mrs. Carlyle's account of her dreary life and servitude to her great husband as a sort of romance or delusion, conveying that she was not at all a lady likely to be thus "put upon." In vulgar phrase, the boot was on the other leg.

I have thought it right to offer this small tribute to one who was in his way an interesting and remarkable man. No place has been found for him in the series known as English Men of Letters; and yet, as I have before pointed out, he had a place in literature that somewhat suggests the position of Dr. Johnson. What Forster said, or what Forster did, was at one time of importance to the community. This sort of arbiter is unknown nowadays, and perhaps would not be

accepted. He will, however, ever be associated with Charles Dickens, as his friend, adviser, admirer, corrector, and biographer. There is a conventional meaning for the term "men of letters," men, that is, who have written books; but in the stricter sense it is surely one who is "learned in letters," as a lawyer is learned in the law. Johnson is much more thought of in this way than as a writer. Forster had this true instinct, and it was a curious thing one day to note his delight when I showed him a recent purchase: a figure of Johnson, *his* prototype, wrought in pottery, seated in chair, in an attitude of wisdom, his arms extended and bent, and evidently expatiating. Looking at it, he delivered an acute bit of criticism worthy of the Doctor himself.

"The interest," he said, "of this figure is not in the modelling, which is good, but because it represents Johnson as he was, in the eye of the crowd of his day; who looked on him, not as the writer, but as the grand *argufier* and layer-down of the law, the 'settler' of any knotty point whatever; with them the Doctor could decide anything. See how his arm is half raised, his fingers outspread, as if about to give his decision. You should show this to Carlyle, who will be delighted with it."

He often recurred to this and to the delight the Sage would have had. I forget whether I followed his advice. On the same occasion he noticed a figure of Washington. "Ah! there he stands," he said, "with his favourite air of state and dignity, and

sense of what was due to his position. You will always notice that in the portraits there was a little assumption of the aristocrat." Forster's criticism was always of this kind—instructive and acute.

Forster was the envied possessor of nearly every one of Boz's MSS.—a treasure at the time not thought very much of, even by Dickens himself, but since his death become of extraordinary value. I should say that each was worth some two or three thousand pounds at the least. How amazing has been this appreciation of what dealers call "the Dickens stuff" during these years! It is almost incredible. I mind the day when a Dickens' book, a Dickens' letter, was taken tranquilly. A relation of my own, an old bachelor, had, as we thought, an eccentric *penchant* for early editions of Boz; and once, on the great man coming to the provincial city where he lived, waited on him to show him what he called his "Old Gold"; to wit, the earlier editions of *Pickwick* and *Nickleby*. We all smiled, and I remember Boz speaking to me good-naturedly of this enthusiasm. Not one of the party then—it was in 1865—dreamed that this old bachelor was far wiser than his generation. The original *Pickwick*, that is bound from the numbers, is indeed a nugget of old gold. I remember once asking Wills, his sub-editor, could I be allowed to have the original MSS. of some of Boz's short stories? He said, "To be sure, that nothing was more easy than to ask him, for the printer sent each back to him after use, carefully sealed up." What became of all

these papers I cannot tell ; but I doubt if anyone was then *very* eager about them.

Lately, turning over some old papers, I came upon a large bundle of proof "slips" of a story I had written for *All the Year Round*. It was called *Howard's Son*. To my surprise and pleasure I found that they had passed through Boz's own hands, and had been corrected throughout in his own careful and elaborate fashion, whole passages written in, others deleted, the punctuation altered and improved. Here was a *trouvaille*. These slips, I may add, have extraordinary value, and in the States would fetch a considerable sum. It was extraordinary what pains Boz took with the papers of his contributors, and how diligently and laboriously he improved and polished them.

Forster's latter days, that is, I suppose, for some seven or eight years, were an appalling state of martyrdom ; no words could paint it. It was gout in its most terrible form, that is, on the chest. This malady was due, in the first place, to his early hard life, when rest and hours of sleep were neglected or set at nought. Too good living also was accountable. He loved good cheer and had an excellent taste in wines, fine clarets, etc. Such things were fatal to his complaint. This gout took the shape of an almost eternal cough, which scarcely ever left him. It began invariably with the night and kept him awake, the waters rising on his chest and overpowering him. I have seen him on the following day, lying spent and

exhausted on a sofa and struggling to get some snatches of sleep, if he could. But as seven o'clock drew near, a change came. There was a dinner-party; he "pulled himself together:" began another jovial night and in good spirits. But he could not resist the tempting wines, etc., and of course had his usual "bad" night. Once dining with me, he as usual brought his Vichy bottle with him, and held forth on the necessity of "putting on the muzzle," restraint, etc. He "lectured" us all in a very suitable way, and maintained his restraint during dinner. There was a bottle of good Corton gently warming at the fire, about which he made inquiries, but which now, alas! need not be opened. When the ladies were gone, he became very pressing on this topic. "My dear fellow, you must *not* let me be a kill-joy, you must really open the bottle for yourself; why should you deny yourself for me? Nonsense!" It suggested Winkle going to fight a duel, saying to his friend, "Do *not* give information to the police." But I was inhospitably inflexible. These little touches were Forster all over. One would have given anything to let him have his two or three glasses, but one had to be cruel to be kind. Old Sam Johnson was of the same pattern, and could not resist a dinner-party, even when in serious plight. He certainly precipitated his death by his greed.

I well recall the confusion and grief of one morning in July, 1870, when opening the *Times* I read in large capitals, DEATH OF CHARLES DICKENS. It

must have brought a shock more or less to every reader. Nothing was less expected, for we had not at that time the recurring evening editions, treading on each other's heels, to keep us posted up every hour in every event of the day.

I am tempted here to copy from an old diary the impressions of that painful time. The words were written on the evening of the funeral at 6 p.m.: "Died, dear Charles Dickens. I think at this moment of his bright genial manner, so cordial and hearty, of the delightful days at Belfast—on the Reading Tours—The Trains—the Evenings at the Hotel—his lying on the sofa listening to my stories and laughing in his joyous way. I think, too, of the last time that I saw him, which was at his office in Wellington Street, whither I went to ask him to come to some theatricals that we were getting up. We talked them over, and then he began to bewail so sadly, the burden of 'going out' to dinner parties. He said that he would like to come, but that he could not promise. However, he might come late in the night if he could get away from other places. I see his figure now before me, standing at the table, the small delicate-formed shoulders. Then bringing me into another room to show me one of the gigantic golden yellow *All the Year Round* placards, presently to be displayed on every wall and hoarding of the kingdom. This was the announcement of a new story I had written for his paper, which he had dubbed 'The Doctor's Mixture,' but of which, alas! he was destined

never to revise the proofs. It had been just hung up 'to try the effect,' and was fresh from the printers."

I look back to another of Forster's visits to Dublin when he came in quest of materials for his *Life of Swift*. He was in the gayest and best of his humours, and behaved much as the redoubtable Doctor Johnson did on his visit to Edinburgh. I see him seated in the library at Trinity College, making his notes, surrounded by the Dons. Dining with him at his hotel, for even here he must entertain his host, he lit his cigar after dinner, when an aged waiter of the old school interrupted: "Ah, you musn't do that. It's agin the rules and forbidden." He little knew his Forster; what a storm broke on his head—"Leave the room, you rascal. How dare you, sir, interfere with me! Get out, sir," with much more: the scared waiter fled. "One of the pleasantest episodes in my life," I wrote in a diary, "has just closed. John Forster come and gone, after his visit here (*i.e.* to Dublin). Don't know when I liked a man more. He was most genial and satisfactory to talk with. His amiable and agreeable wife with him. She told a great deal of Boz and his life at home, giving a delightful picture of his ordinary day. He would write all the morning till one o'clock, and no one was allowed to see or interrupt him. Then came lunch; then a long hearty walk until dinner time. During the evening he would read in his own room, but the door was kept open so that he might hear the girls playing—an amiable touch. At Christmas time,



when they would go down on a visit, he would entertain them by reading aloud his proofs and passages not yet published. She described to us 'Boffin,' out of *Our Mutual Friend*, as admirable. He shows all to Forster before-hand, and consults him as to plot, characters, etc. He has a humorous fashion of giving his little boys comic names; later to appear in his stories. Thus, one known as 'Plorn,' which later appeared as 'Plornish.'" This is a pleasant picture of the great writer's domestic life, and it gives also a faint 'adumbration' of what is now forgotten: the intense curiosity and eager anticipation that was abroad as to what he was doing or preparing. Hints of his characters got known; their movements and developments were discussed, and the incidents of his story were like public events. We have nothing of this nowadays, for no writer or story rouses the same interest. Forster also told us a good deal about Carlyle, whose proof-sheets, from the abundant corrections, cost three or four times what the original 'setting' did." Thus the diary.

Once, on a Sunday in Dublin, I brought Forster to the cathedral in Marlborough Street to hear the High Mass, at which Cardinal Cullen officiated. He sat it out very patiently, and I remember on coming out drew a deep sigh, or gasp, with the remark, "Well, I suppose it's all right."

Forster, whatever might be said of his sire's calling, was at least of a good old Newcastle border stock of fine "grit" and sturdily independent. He

was proud of his stock, and he has often lamented, not merely in print, but to myself, how people would confound him with mere Fosters. "Now we," he would say vehemently, "are Forsters with an *r*." When he became acquainted with a person nearly connected with myself, he was immensely pleased to find that she was a Foster ; and, as she was of rank, it was amusing to find him not quite so eager to repudiate the Foster (without the *r*). "We are all the same, my dear friend. All Forresters, abbreviated as Forster or Foster, all one ; the same crest." The lady had some fragments of a fine old crimson Derby service, plates with the Foster escutcheon, and he was immensely gratified when she presented him with one.

FREDERICK LOCKER was certainly one of the most agreeable and most interesting and most amiable beings that could be imagined. His face had a sort of Quixote quaintness, so had his talk, while his humour had a pleasant flavour. He lived at his place in the country, but I always looked forward—and now look back, alas!—to the many pleasant talks we would have together, each more than an hour long, on the occasion of these rare visits. All his stories were delightful, all his tastes elegant. His knowledge of books was profound and truly refined. His taste was most fastidious. Towards the close of his career he prepared a catalogue of his choice library, which showed to the world at once how elegant was his taste and knowledge. At once it

became *recherché*. A few copies at a guinea were for sale, with a view to let the public know something of his treasures, but it is now at a fancy price. Once when I was in a dealer's shop "haggling" over an "old play," for which I think two guineas was asked, and which seemed to me a monstrous price, Locker came in quietly, and took the book up, which was the interlude of *Facke Drum*. I told him of the price—"Take it, I advise you, he said, it is very cheap. I assure you I gave a vast deal more for my copy." I took it, and I believe at this moment I could get for my copy ten times that sum, in fact, there has not been a copy in the market. This interesting man was, I fancy, happy in both his marriages; the first bringing him rank and connection, the second lands and wealth. I bring him in here because he associated with Forster in one of his most grotesque moods. To Forster, however, this agreeable spirit was taboo. He had offended the great man, and as it had a ludicrous cast, and was, besides, truly Forsterian, I may here recur to it. Forster, as I have stated, had been left by Landor, the copyright of his now value unsaleable writings, and he was more pleased at the intended compliment than gratified by the legacy itself. My friend Locker, whose *Lyra* was well known, had thoughtlessly inserted in a new edition one, or some, of Landor's short pieces, and went his way. One day Forster discovered "the outrage," wrote tremendous letters, threatened law, and, I believe, obtained some satisfaction for the trespasses. But during the alter-

cation he found that a copy had been presented to the Athenæum Club library, and it bore the usual inscription and Minerva's head of the Club. Forster, *sans façon*, put the book in his pocket and took it away home, confiscated it in fact. There was a great hubbub. The committee met, determined that their property had been taken away, and demanded that it should be brought back. Forster flatly refused; defied the Club to do its worst. Secretary, solicitors, and every means were used to bring him to reason. It actually ended in his retaining the book, the Club shrinking from entering into public contest with so redoubtable an antagonist.

Forster was sumptuous in his tastes; always liking to have the best. When he wanted a thing considerations of the expense would not stand in the way. He was an admirable judge of a picture, and could in a few well-chosen words point out its merits. When he heard Lord Lytton was going to India, he gave Millais a commission to paint a portrait of the new Viceroy. Millais used good humouredly to relate the lofty condescending style in which it was announced. "It gives me, I assure you, great pleasure to learn that you are so advancing in your profession. I think highly of your abilities and *shall be glad to encourage them*;" or something to that effect. Millais at this time was at the very top of his profession, as indeed Forster knew well, but the state and grandeur of the subject, and his position in expending so large a sum—I suppose a thousand guineas, for it was a full

length—lifted my old friend into one of his dreams. The portrait was a richly-coloured and effective one, giving the staring owl-like eyes of the poet-diplomatist. Another of Forster's purchases was Maclise's huge picture of Caxton showing his first printed book to the King.

It was a treat and an education to go round a picture gallery with him, so excellent and to the point were his criticisms. He seized on the *essential* merit of each. I remember going with him to see the collected works of his old friend Leslie, R.A., when he frankly confessed his disappointment at the general *thinness* of the colour and style, brought out conspicuously when the works were all gathered together: this was the effect, with a certain *chalkiness*. At the Dublin Exhibition he was greatly struck by a little cabinet picture by an Anglo-German artist, one Webb, and was eager to secure it, though he objected to the price. However, on the morning of his departure the secretary drove up on an outside car to announce that the artist would take fifty pounds, which Forster gave. This was "The Chess-players," which now hangs at South Kensington.

He had deep feeling and hesitation even as to putting anything into print without due pause and preparation. Print had not then become what it is now, with the telephone, type-writing, and other aids, a mere expression of conversation and of whatever floating ideas are passing through the mind. Mr. Purcell's wholesale exhibition of Cardinal

Manning's inmost thoughts and feelings would have shocked him inexpressibly. I was present when a young fellow, to whom he had given some papers, brought him the proofs in which the whole was printed off without revision or restraint. He gave him a severe rebuke. "Sir, you seem to have no idea of the *sacredness* of the Press; you *pitch in* everything, as if into a bucket. Such carelessness is inexcusable." Among them was a letter from Colburn, the former husband of his wife. "I am perfectly *astounded* at you! Have you not the tact to see that such a thing as that should not appear?" And he drew his pen indignantly across it. That was a good lesson for the youth. In such matters, however, he did not spare friend or stranger.

It is curious, considering how sturdy a pattern of Englishman was Forster, that all his oldest friends were Irishmen, such as Maclise, Emerson Tennant, Whiteside, Macready, Quain, Foley, Mulready, and many more. For all these he had almost an affection, and he cherished their old and early intimacy. He liked especially the good-natured impulsive type of the Goldy pattern; for such he had interest and sympathy. As a young man, when studying for the Bar, he had been in Chitty's office, where he had for companions Whiteside and Tennant, afterwards Sir Emerson. Whiteside became the brilliant parliamentary orator and Chief Justice; Tennant a baronet and Governor of Ceylon; and Forster himself the distinguished writer and critic, the friend



and biographer of Dickens. It was a remarkable trio certainly. Chitty, the veteran conveyancer, his old master, he never forgot, and was always delighted to have him to dinner, to do him honour in every way. His son, the judge, was a favourite *protégé*, and became his executor. He had a warm regard for Sir Richard Quain, who was beside Lord Beaconsfield *in extremis*, who literally knew everyone that ought to be known, and who would visit a comparatively humble patient with equal interest. Quain was thoroughly good-natured, ever friendly and even affectionate. Forster's belief in him was as that in a fetish.

The faithful Quain was with his friend to the last moment. Poor Forster was being gradually overpowered by the rising bronchial humours with which, as he grew weaker, he could not struggle with or baffle. It was then that Quain, bending over, procured him a short reprieve and relief in his agony, putting his fingers down his throat and clearing away the impeding masses.

Sir Richard was not only physician-in-ordinary, but the warm and devoted friend, official consultant, as he was of the whole *coterie*. For a long course of years he had charge of his friend's health, if health it could be called where all was disease and misery; and it was his fate to see him affectionately through the great crisis at the last. There was a deal of this affection in Quain; he was eminently good-natured; good true-hearted Quain! Many a poor priest of his



country has been to him, and from them he would never take, though not of his faith. Quain was indeed the literary man's physician; more so than Sir Andrew Clarke, who was presumed to hold the post by letters patent. For Clarke was presumed to know and cure the literary ailments; but Quain was the genial guide, philosopher and friend, always one of themselves, and indeed a *littérateur* himself. Who will forget his quaint little figure, shrewd face, the native accent, never lost; and his "Ah me dear fellow, shure what can I do?" His red-wheeled carriage, generally well horsed, was familiar to us all, and recognisable. How he maintained this equipage, for we are told what "makes a mare to go," it was hard to conceive, for the generous man would positively refuse to take fees from his more intimate friends, at least of the literary class. With me, a very old friend and patient, there was a perpetual battle. He set his face against the two guinea fee, but humorously held out for his strict guinea, and would not bate the shilling. I have known him when a client presented two sovereigns empty his pockets of silver and scrupulously return nineteen shillings. And what an adviser he was! What confidence he imparted! The moment he bade you sit down and "tell him all about it" you felt secure.

It was always delightful to meet him. He had his moments of gloom, like most of his countrymen, for he never lost his native "hall mark," and retained to the last that sort of wheedling tone which is common

in the South of Ireland. Yet he had none of that good-natured insincerity, to which a particular class of Irish are given. He was thoroughly sincere and genuine, and ready to support his words by deeds. His humour was racy. As when the Prince of Wales was sympathising with him on a false report of his death, adding, good naturedly, "I really was afraid, Dr. Quain, that we had lost you, and was thinking of sending a wreath." "Well, Sir," said the medico, "recollect that you are now *committed to the wreath.*"

I did not note, however, that when the event at last took place the wreath was sent. I always fancied that he was a disappointed man, and that he felt that his high position had not been suitably recognised; or at least that the recognition had been delayed. The baronetcy came late. But what he had set his heart upon, and claimed as his due, was the Presidency of the College of Physicians. This he was always near attaining, but men like Sir Andrew Clarke were preferred to him. I was a special friend for many years, and have had many a favoured "lift" in his carriage when we were going the same way. I was glad to be allowed to dedicate to him some volumes of personal memoirs. The last time I met this genial and amiable man was at the table of a well-known law lord, whom he astonished considerably by addressing me across the table all through dinner by my christian name. He was at the time seriously ill, in his last illness in fact, when, as he said, he had been "tortured to death by their operations." He had

good taste in art, was fond of the French school of engraving, and was the friend and counsellor of many an artist. He was of the old Dickens school, of the *coterie* that included Maclise, Jerrold and the rest.

Once, when he and his family were staying close to Ipswich, I asked him to order me a photograph of the Great White Horse Inn, noted as the scene of Mr. Pickwick's adventure, and to my pleasure and astonishment found that he had commissioned an artist to prepare a whole series of large photographs depicting the old inn, both without and within, and from every point of view. In this handsome way he would oblige his friends. He was in immense demand as a cheerful diner out.

I was amused by a cynical appreciation of a friend and patient of his, uttered shortly after his death. We had met and were lamenting his loss. "Nothing, nobody can fill his place," he said.—"It is sad to lose such a friend."—"Indeed it is," said my companion, "I don't know what I shall do. No one else ever understood my constitution. I really don't know whom I am to go to now"—and he went his way in a pettish mood, as though his physician had rather shabbily deserted him. Alas, is there not much of this when one of these pleasant "specialists" departs?

His faithful devotion to his old friend Forster during that long illness was unflagging. He could not cure, but he did all that was possible by his unwearying attention to alleviate. How often have

I found the red chariot waiting at the door, or when I was sitting with him would the door open and the grave manservant announce "Sir Rich-hard QUAIN." His talk, gossip, news, was part of the alleviation.

After all that must have been an almost joyous moment that brought poor Forster his release from those awful and intolerable days and nights of agony, borne with a fortitude of which the world had no conception. Eternal frightful spasms of coughing day and night, together with other maladies of the most serious kind. And yet, on the slightest respite, this man of wonderful fortitude would turn gay and festive, recover his spirits, and look forward to some enjoyment, a dinner it might be, where he was the old Forster once more, smiling enticingly on his favourite ladies, and unflinchingly prepared to go back to the night of horrors that awaited him!

Mrs. Forster, as her friends knew well, was one of the sweetest women "under the sun," a sweetness brought out by contrast with the obstreperous ways of her tempestuous mate. Often when something went wrong, rather did not go with the almost ideal smoothness at one of his many banquets (and there never was a more generously hospitable man), it was piteous to see her trying to smooth away the incident with the certainty of inflaming the dictator, and turning his wrath upon herself.

She knew well that not he, but his malady, was accountable. She believed from her heart in the duality of Forster. There was a hapless page boy

whose very presence and assumed stupidity used to inflame his master to perfect Bersaker fits of rage. The scenes were exquisitely ludicrous, if painful ; the contrast between the giant and the object of his wrath, scared out of his life with terror, was absolutely diverting. Thus the host would murmur "Biscuits !" which was not heard or not heeded ; then louder and more sharply, "BISCUITS !" then a roar that made all start, "BISCUITS !!" Poor Mrs. Forster's agitation was sad to see, and between her and the butler the luckless lad was somehow got from the room. This attendant was an admirable comedy character, and in his way a typical servant, stolid and reserved. No one could have been so portentously sagacious as *he* looked. It was admirable to see his unruffled calm during his master's outbursts when something had gone wrong during the dinner. No violence could betray him into anything but the most placid and correct replies. There was something fine and pathetic in this, for it showed that he also recognised that it was not his true master that was thus raging. I recall talking with him shortly after his master's death. After paying his character a fine tribute he spoke of his illness. "You see, sir," he said at last, "what was at the bottom of it all was he 'ad no *staminer*, no *staminer*—NO STAMINER, sir." And he repeated the word many times with enjoyment. I have no doubt he picked it up at Forster's table and it had struck him as a good effective English word, spelled as he pronounced it.

Such was John Forster.

58  
DRYDEN PRESS :

J. DAVY & SONS, 137, LONG ACRE, LONDON.





PR  
4705  
F4 Z68

THE LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA  
Santa Barbara

---

THIS BOOK IS DUE ON THE LAST DATE  
STAMPED BELOW.

---

50m-1,'63 (D4743s8)476



3 1205 01978 8510

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



A A

001 424 592

2

